RAPID MARKET SURVEY COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a method for independently centrally electronically accumulating market survey data from different content rapidly disseminated market surveys from a plurality of panelist stations located at diverse locations.

BACKGROUND OF THE ART

Market survey data collection systems are well known in the art. One of the more common prior art systems for collecting such data involves the use of survey booklets or questionnaires which are disseminated by mail to a diverse group of panelists, individually hand written into by the panelists to record the survey data relating to their particular shopping habits for various identified products, mailed back to the survey company by the panelist where the data is then key punched and ultimately read into a data processor or computer for accumulative processing of all of this data. This procedure, although satisfactory under most circumstances, is time consuming, costly and provides many opportunities for erroneous data entry due to carelessness either by the panelist who is writing in the data by hand or by the keypunch operator who is subsequently encoding the hand-written data. Moreover, there are limitations in this technique which inhibit the ability of the survey organization to at any time rapidly change the survey or rapidly conduct follow-up or modified surveys based on the results of a prior survey, as well as to rapidly collect and analyze the survey data. With the advent of electronic inventory control and supermarket scanners there has been considerable interest in bringing market data collection into the electronic age. An example of such a market survey data collection method is disclosed in commonly owned U.S. Pat. No. 4,355,372 which discloses an electronic market survey data collection method for independently electronically collecting related market survey data from a plurality of diverse locations which overcomes many of the disadvantages of the prior art. In the disclosed method, the collected survey data is temporarily stored at each of the independent diverse locations for subsequent transmission thereof over a telephone type link for accumulative processing thereof at a remote central electronic data processor. At each of the independent data collection locations, an interactive changeable prompt message display is provided on an alphanumeric visual display device in a portable hand held terminal, indicating a particular one of a plurality of market survey information categories in a predefined sequence of these categories. A market survey data input signal corresponding to the particular displayed category is then provided to a buffer storage in response to the interactive prompt message display. The actual data input from the buffer storage is then displayed on the alphanumeric visual display device in order to enable verification of the correctness of the input, in which instance a confirmation command input signal is then provided to a microcomputer in the terminal. The content of the buffer storage is then temporarily stored in a static memory in response to the confirmation command input signal. This interactive sequence recycles for each market survey data transaction. Thus, several problems present in the prior art are overcome by this method; however, this method does not involve the downstream loading of any survey questionnaires or the ability to provide multiple surveys to the same panelist or different surveys to different panelists or to rapidly change the survey content or conduct a modified survey based on the results of a prior survey by merely downstream loading a new survey questionnaire over a two way communications link which permits transmission of the survey results back to a central data processor. Thus, although there is rapid survey data collection via telephone there is no provision for rapid survey dissemination. The improvement herein on the patented method described in commonly owned U.S. Pat. No. 4,355,372 overcomes these disadvantages of the prior art. Thus, although the concept of downstream loading of software per se is known in the prior art, such as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,064,490, and the concept of remote transmission of survey data over telephone lines per se is known in the prior art, such as disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,210,472 and 3,950,618, and the concept of broadcast of survey questionnaires per se is also known, such as disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,151,370, 4,107,735 and 3,546,791, there are no prior art electronic survey data collection and survey dissemination methods known to applicants which combine all of these features into an efficient, flexible and rapid market survey data collection and survey dissemination method in which interactive variable multiple question market survey questionnaires may be downstream loaded to a group of panelists and individually tailored for these panelists to obtain almost instantaneous survey responses at the head end for rapid tabulation and analysis, as well as follow up, of variable surveys. This, despite such prior art systems as disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,331,973 and 4,331,974 which disclose systems for the transmission of targeted televison ads to panelists by panelist address match, in place of normal television ads, based on the prior storage of purchase demographics for the panelist transmitted to a host computer by a cooperating store using a UPC scan of the panelist's ID card and purchases, there are no satisfactory rapid survey collection and dissemination methods known to applicants, such as which permit rapid follow up and modification of surveys. Similarly, to applicants' knowledge the prior art electronic data collection systems discussed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,355,372, such as U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,942,157 and 4,016,542, have not been employed in connection with electronic collection of market survey data from diversely located panelists such as in the home and/or rapid survey dissemination, do not employ an interactive prompt message sequence, and moreover do not employ downstream loading of survey questionnaires. This is true as well for the type of prior art hand held data processing terminal disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,115,870.

Thus, although remote transmission of electronic collected survey data is known in the prior art, these prior art systems are not flexible and do not readily enable the survey questionnaires to be rapidly disseminated, changed or modified based on the results of prior surveys so that no satisfactory prior art system or method known to applicants has been developed which enables variable market survey questionnaires to be rapidly disseminated to diversely located panelists from a central location and the resultant responses to be accumulatively processed at that central location in a rapid